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CO-OPERATION BETWEEN UNDP AND ECA CONCERNING THE CRITICAL ECONOMIC SITUATION IN AFRICA

Co-operation between UNDP and ECA concerning the critical economic situation in Africa

I. Introduction

It is known worldwide that Africa is suffering from an unprecedented crisis. The problems facing the continent have been sufficiently and accurately presented in numerous reports from both inside and outside the United Nations system.

Even more so, they have been conscientiously defined and described as they exist by the Africans themselves. On this matter we will mention the numerous works undertaken jointly by the secretariats of ECA and OAU which were carried out during the course of the special session of the ECA Conference of Ministers and the special session of African Ministers for Foreign Affairs, which took place at Addis Ababa on 28 and 29 March 1986 and 30 and 31 March 1986 respectively, during which a truthful assessment of the economic situation in Africa was drawn up and a Plan of action adopted. The plan called the Priority Programme for Economic Recovery and Development in Africa should, if it is put into force, permit the laying of the essential foundations before leading to African self-sustained development. Since then, a plan has been made by the African countries to the entire international community to help them in the accomplishment of this mammoth task.

The President of the OAU, H.E. President Abdou Diouf, asked the secretariat of the United Nations, to organize a Special Session of the General Assembly to debate this problem. The results are known to all, more than promising, and hopeful, if all the agreements are kept by everyone, a noticeable alleviation to this stranglehold of poverty which is tightening more and more around our continent. The best way to attain this objective, the important thing, as stressed in the Priority Programme report, is that measures should be taken with a view to improving the structures and environment in which international co-operation has taken place up until now.

As a preliminary to that the report stresses, among other things, the necessity to:

(a) Adopt a "support programme" approach rather than a "support project" approach as has been the tendency in the past;

(b) Proceed to a critical evaluation of the efficiency of technical assistance in Africa.

We ought to mention here the important role UNDP found itself attributed with at the close of the Special session of the General Assembly in the implementation of the United Nations Action Programme for Economic Recovery and Development in Africa for the period 1986-1990.

II. UNDP - ECA co-operation and their respective roles in the implementation of the Priority Programme

The ECA Conference of Ministers is due to open in October to draw conclusions from the special session and to decide which major steps are to be taken, particularly concerning the use of UNDP resources allocated to the development of Africa for the period of the fourth cycle 1987-1991.

For its part, UNDP, which is the central organisation of the United Nations System when it comes to development and, has for a long time been aware of the economic situation in Africa. UNDP has always spoken out in different debates concerning solution to development problems; and more importantly it has tried and continues to try to orientate its action to suit the needs stated by the African States. It is therefore natural that the Governing Council, during its 33rd session in June 1986, made a resolution since adopted by the Economic and Social Council (number 86/27) authorizing UNDP Administrator to take appropriate actions within the context of his mandate for the implementation of the Priority Action programme. The same resolution asks the Administrator to make concrete proposals to be presented to the Governing Council at its session on what UNDP can do within the limits of the action programme in conformity with the priorities stated therein and in relation to the technical assistance programme in Africa.

It is clear, according to this report, that the two secretariats of UNDP and ECA see themselves in this respect given a very important role for which they must co-ordinate their politics and strategies with a view to bringing about the shared platform that is the Priority Action Programme to the extent of their respective capacities. For all that, the two secretariats have always co-operated; but because there is a new dimension to this co-operation it would perhaps be interesting to review some aspects with the aim to identify possible weaknesses but also improvements which could be made to strengthen this co-operation. Before that, we note with satisfaction that the results of the technical assistance between UNDP and ECA are positive and that the United Nations Development Programme should strengthen its technical assistance, especially at such a crucial moment coinciding with the beginning of the fourth cycle.

(a) Regional programming

During the third programming cycle which will be followed by UNDP and ECA have always known how to make the necessary arrangements, by meetings and personal contacts, to consult and work together in the drawing up of regional programmes and projects.

For the fourth cycle, the Priority Programme clearly defines the fundamental objectives for the continent during the next five years:

(i) strengthening of national capacities to face crisis situations;

(ii) concentration on the development of agriculture and its support activities;

(iii) development and rehabilitation of agro-alimentary industries;

iv) desertification and drought;

v) improvement in the management of the economy of these countries;

vi) development of human resources;

(vii) strengthening of institutional structures;

(viii) promotion of intra-African co-operation;

(ix) changes at the level of political economies;

(x) promotion of subregional activities.

An orientation documen t has been prepared by UNDP in collaboration with ECA, which should serve as basic guidelines for programming activities. However, this dialogue as it stands has been rather unbalanced in favour of UNDP in the sense that UNDP has always been the initiator of the process, defining by that even the priority sectors to be covered by assistance, and this long before the above-mentioned recommendations were known. However, this orientation document was discussed and adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers in Yaounde in April 1986. We can therefore suppose that it follows the guideline of the Priority Programme. For its practical implementation a joint exercise for a permanent information exchange system and programming missions within the States will be the best way to bring about a realistic programme easier to implement and co-ordinate. The Priority Programme for Economic Recovery in Africa should on all occasions be the essential element on which all actions should be based including, first of all, the UNDP programme to be defined for the fourth cycle. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the present ground rules are reviewed in order to: considerably strengthen personal contacts between the UNDP African Bureau, UNDP Arab States Bureau and the ECA Secretariat; undertake much more work together in the field in order to really understand the true needs of the populations and the States suffering from this unprecedented crisis.

(b) National Programming

Concerning programming of the national level, ECA has not taken an active part up until now. The states find themselves faced with specialized agencies which everyone knows unfortunately do not always have the interest at heart for the countries that nevertheless they wish to help. In this regard, UNDP, inspite with its good judgement is sometimes caught between the hammer and the nail with these agencies and the governments. Since 1983, a new methodology called 'national evaluation and programming for technical co-operation' has been introduced by UNDP to help governments

identify their priorities in terms of technical assistance. However, active participation by the Economic Commission for Africa at the discussions of the national programmes would help. If only for its catalytic effect, facilitating at the same time better co-ordination and a certain coherence between national, subregional and regional projects and taking into account the priorities defined in the Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos. This can be done by request, whether from the country, or from ECA if they consider it necessary and if funds are available. It will be a case of guiding and advising governments in their choice by an evaluation of the various propositions put to them. UNDP, for its part, should encourage this intervention in the cases of countries it believes have particular need of such assistance.

It is also pleased to see, and in this regard following pledges by the international community in the course of the special session, that ECA definitely wishes to participate with member States at round tables with sponsors and bring more dynamism to this process. The inclusion of this point on the agenda of the Conference is significant, active support from member States, and moreover co-operation from all the United Nations institutions and notably UNDP, will be the best guarantees of success of this enterprise.

(c) The role of resident representatives

Resident representatives, important craftsmen for national programmes, are however used only rarely by UNDP headquarters for the development of regional programmes. They are not at all involved or very rarely consulted, so much so that they feel very little concern for something in which they have not participated and for which therefore they have little sympathy. The consequence is that they totally disinterest themselves from these projects during their execution whereas, according to the texts, these resident representatives of UNDP are also representatives of ECA in the field. Their contact with the Commission secretariat is kept to a minimum or in any case it has no connection with the activities going on in the countries to which they are assigned and which are of interest to ECA. For example, very few of them have visited the Commission in the last 10 years, whereas each year they visit the specialized agencies. It is in the end a great potentiality for better apprehension of problems, better execution of projects and co-ordination of programmes which is so far unused. It is hoped that UNDP will review its approach in this precise domain because the role of resident representatives in the co-ordination of development actions is essential.

UNDP should in fact give precise instructions to resident representatives concerning designing, formulation and execution of regional and subregional programmes; resident representatives should also visit ECA headquarters during missions with other executing agents.

(d) Project excution by ECA

According to its resolution 33/202 adopted in January 1979, the Economic and Social Council granted to all its economic commissions the status of project executing agent in the same way as the specialized agencies. Although having always executed projects, ECA experiences some difficulties in facing up to this new responsibility. These difficulties are of two types. It is worth noting that:

(a) United Nations headquarters in New York has not decentralised recruitment authorization at P5 level and above; and

(b) This is also the case with the purchasing of equipment costing more than $US40 000, in spite of the resolution adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers and addressed to UN headquarters. This, it is true, creates certain difficulties in project execution.

The secretariat should get down to quickly solving these problems if it wants to see the organization play the role assigned to it which will be strengthened following the execution of the Priority Programme. In order to help, ECA member States should, in their negotiations with the United Nations Secretariat and other agencies the system, obtained the alluviation of constraints at present imposed in the area of recruitment of technical and high level personnel and also concerning the acquisition of necessary equipment for these projects. It is also important, and this follows one of the recommendations of the Priority Programme to work with a view to obtaining for the execution of African projects and programmes "the use of national skills and African expertise" while still bearing in mind that ECA has always recruited African experts.

(e) Assistance to the secretariat

As part of its assistance in strengthening the ECA secretariat, UNDP has established a Liaison Bureau in Addis, which is precisely in charge of consistance to the latter in its programming exercises and project formulation. However, the structure of this Bureau and the scope given to it by UNDP headquarters do not permit it to play an operational role. In fact, this Bureau, although showing a great deal of dynamism and initiative, is not authorized to take action on anything concerning project revision concerning even minor matters, or to sign project documents whatever amount the funds involved, etc. All that must be referred to UNDP headquarters. It is without doubt that in its technical assistance to ECA the results gained since the creation of the Liaison Bureau are most satisfactory, especially in the areas of identification, formulation and programming. However, looking forward to the fourth cycle where co-operation between UNDP and ECA will most likely notably be reinforced it would be useful perhaps if the Liaison Bureau's terms of reference could be reviewed so as to give it more operational responsibilities. Also, we think that the composition and quality of the Bureau personnel should be such that someone is given the position of resident representative, having the authority and power to make decisions concerning operational activities.

(f) Assistance for intergovernmental organizations

ECA has helped in the creation of several intergovernmental co-operation organizations, research institutes, training centres etc. In almost all cases these organizations got started thanks to financial support from UNDP. Nevertheless, UNDP aid is supposed to be only a support; the member States must themselves take over the final responsibility. Unfortunately, in almost all cases, member States have not always continuously faced up to their obligations and UNDP has found itself forced to continue its financial aid, which it is still carrying out. However considering the present financial crisis at the heart of the United Nations, UNDP can no longer continue to patronize them and has informed member States of this situation. The time has perhaps come therefore for the participating States first of all, and also for the ECA secretariat, to state their undertaking in concrete form and take on new responsibilities. The challenge has been perfectly understood by the ECA secretariat which is already exploring ways and means to make these institutions self-sufficient. On this point, it is regrettable that the conclusions of the interstates Committee, in charge of studying the question and aiming to abolish or merge certain institutes, was not able to gain the necessary support from member States. For its part, UNDP could help in this essential reorientation. By means of clearly defined assistance, of a two-to-three year time limit, it would help those institutes which could be adapted to develop internal capacities to generate resources and attain self-sufficiency.

(g) Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOC)

The MULPOCs have played, at their respective regional levels, an essential role, notably in starting up large regional intergovernmental organizations (ECCAS and PTA, etc.). They should continue this role in the future and even increase it, taking into account the particularly difficult period the continent is going through. In the perspective of the constant effective presence of ECA in the States and the supportive and animative role it is required to play, the MULPOCs should be fully used. They should be the secretariats' instruments on the field.

Their role in terms of assistance for the States and the intergovernmental organizations in terms of programme development and formulation and monitoring in the execution of regional projects could be a fundamental contribution in the putting into practice of one of the key recommendations of the Priority Programme, i.e., the integration of the subregional economic areas. The ECA secretariat, aware of the importance of what is at stake, shows no special consideration or effort to maintain and strengthen these centres by the secondment of certain specialized experts headquarters personnel. However, faced with such great needs these efforts appear rather insignificant. This is why in its distribution of new personnel which could be used for the Priority Programme, UNDP should give a special place to MULPOCs to strengthen their operational mandate in relation to the new aims defined by the Priority Programme. MULPOCs as well as the

ECA secretariat are very much affected by the present financial crisis in the United Nations system. However, the member States are in greater numbers announcing that part of the contributions to the UNTFAD should be allocated to MULPOC programmes. This tendency should be encouraged in order to help alleviate the United Nations financial crisis.

Conclusion

The crisis in Africa is serious and it has dramatically brought to light new needs. The Priority Action Programme for Economic Recover in Africa was conceived with these needs in mind. Some criticism has been made as to its realism. But is not the ghost of imminent disaster in a way surrealist? UNDP by taking the initiative in opening a debate on the critical situation in Africa, has indicated to the whole international community the way to follow to show great human solidarity, the only way to help Africa get over this difficult stage.